

Contributions

HOW CONFERENCE CAN HELP OUR ISOLATED PEOPLE MORE

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Having had a long experience of living in an isolated condition, I have been selected as spokesman for our many Brethren whose lot it has been to be thus situated. As to the duties of conference towards our disunited brethren who are deprived of the blessed privilege of hearing the Gospel proclaimed as it was in primitive times, and as our brethren believe it should be taught now, I think the most direct way to help our isolated people, many of whom are crying out like the Macedonians of old, "Come over into our country and help us." Acts. 16: 9, would be to send the Gospel to them.

I would to God that our brethren who are assembled in conference could with force realize, and with the same assurance conclude as did those brethren at Troas, after having seen the vision, that God had undoubtedly called them to preach the Gospel to the isolated ones who are urgently appealing for help. I repeat that the most direct way to help them would be to take the Gospel to them, and by so doing you would contribute much to their moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1: 16. Salvation is an act of saving, or preservation from eternal misery. The power that preserves us from an endless destruction, the awful calamity which shall inevitably befall every impenitent evil doer, is inserted in the Gospel. Then to deprive one of the Gospel would be to take away from them that saving power which the Gospel contains. The experience of an isolated Christian life, and the discouragement of such an experience are indeed depressing. And the injury to the spiritual, or divine nature is demoralizing, and I might say almost irreparable. The Christian life is one of growth, and progression. After having exercised faith in God, we are to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, which is the crowning virtue, the chiefest of Christian graces, you will very readily see from this one scripture that there must needs be a developing and expanding of character before we can attain "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Eph. 4: 13. And it is not enough that the ruling passion of the heart be a desire for perfection, but there should be a diligent use of all the means that our Heavenly Father has provided for the glorious attainment. And it is very evident that an isolated Christian does not have access to all of the provided means for this end. We are to a very great extent influenced by our environments; we influence, and are influenced either for good, or evil, by the class with which we mingle or associate. Each person exercises a considerable degree of influence over those associates. And as the natural

tendency of the human race is to degenerate, and being continually tempted to neglect the spiritual, and being deprived of some of the means of grace that the Lord has provided for the perfecting of his people, it is almost certain that there will be a falling away; the interest in, and desire for spiritual things will decrease little by little, enjoyment of religion will grow less, the desire to read the Bible will become less, the scriptures which was given to us for Christian "discipline, or instruction in righteousness," (II Tim. 3, 16,) will be disregarded. This is what might be called a backslidden condition, and I think the condition of mind has been reached which the Lord does detest. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold or hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Rev. 3, 16.

It is universally conceded by all Christians that whenever a person ceases to enjoy their religion, they have fallen into a backslidden condition. The cares, anxieties, and the deceitfulness of riches deceive them, and the word gets choked out. Many thus foolishly drown themselves in destruction and perdition. Others might have reached heaven were it not for the fact that they were separated from the people of God, and from the full opportunity to grow.

The cares of the world engross the affections, and beget anxiety and danger, and not the least is the danger of losing heaven. Brethren, remember that we are our brother's keeper, and to a great extent responsible for the spiritual developments of our brother. If he is deprived of some of the means of grace, and those means lie within our power, and yet we fail to reach them out to our brother, God will hold us responsible in the day of reckoning. I sometimes think that God permits certain things to exist, and continue for an indefinite time, things that are not pleasing to him, just in order to test or prove his people. As an instance just now: here is India's perishing millions, starving multitudes, which now number 40,000,000. Oh what a pitiable picture presents itself to the Christian world. The Christian Herald, of March 21, presents a heartrending scene, a group of children who are reduced to mere skeletons, the teacher's fingers on the arm of one of these little starving sufferers, presents a contrast that moves the heart. The claim of Christian brotherhood, added to the claim of common humanity ought to bring aid to the famine stricken creatures in their hour of suffering. Thus the prophet's words may be fulfilled, "That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this." Isa. 41, 20.

I said we were considerably influenced by our environments. Yet it is possible to live a true, devoted and diligent Christian life independent of our environments. But it requires a strong will power, and a determined effort with the help of God to resist evil and be given up to the will of God, especially where there is little or no spiritual influence.

Some of the means of grace which the isolated Christian is deprived of. 1st. He is deprived of Christian fellowship, or the fellowship of kindred mind, "which is like to that above," says the poet. And it has been my experience that whenever deprived of the association of those who are related to me by the spiritual birth that I am completely out of my element. And it is very depressing to be out of one's element. The ungodly and Christless man who unconsciously some how wandered in to a prayer meeting, feels very much annoyed and out of place, because there is no harmony of thought, of feeling, and of purpose. His thoughts are antagonistic, and so there is no unity of thought or purpose. There is an old adage, "The like begets the like, and birds of a feather flock together." One of the sweetest joys, and which the Christian most fondly delights in, is to converse with the brother of like faith on the things of God, the things that pertain to their eternal welfare. Their fears and hopes and joys and aims are one. The poet has beautifully expressed the true sentiment of their hearts toward each other in the following words, "We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathetic tear." 2nd. The isolated Christian is deprived of the blessings of the sanctuary of the Lord. The house of God with all its sacred and hallowed influences and which we have as a sure refuge from all the storms of life.

The house of God with all the blessings that come to us while engaging in his worship, may truly be said to be one of the greatest means of grace. Oh what a blessing is church privileges! Not until we are deprived of it do we really appreciate its value. Oh how gracious it is to sit under the droppings of the sanctuary! Oh what rest and solace comes to the inner man! How few, comparatively, appreciate and appropriate this means of grace.

The Psalmist compares his delight in the altar of God's house to the rest of a bird in its nest, Ps. 84: 3. And again in his longing for communion of the sanctuary he exclaims, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." And again in Ps. 99. He exhorts all the people to worship God at his holy hill in Zion. The earthly tabernacle is where he has especially promised to meet his people and bless them while engaged in his divine worship. For reference see Ps. 20: 2; 77: 13; Isa. 60: 13.

His heart rejoiced and his tongue was glad when they said unto him, "Come let us go unto the house of the Lord."

"I love thy church, O God,
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thine hand.
Sure as thy truth shall last,
To Zion shall be given,
The brightest glories earth can yield,
And brighter bliss of heaven."

The very moment Christ is formed in the soul there comes a voluntary desire for the house of God. This is one of the sure indi-